

VZCZCXRO2322
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0173/01 3230808
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 190808Z NOV 09
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1212
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1303

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000173

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: NORTHERN RED-YELLOW DIALOGUE EXPANDS TO INCLUDE GOVERNMENT,
BUSINESS LEADERS

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 160 (DIALOGUE AT SLOWER PACE)
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 138 (BEGIN DIALOGUE)
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 132 (DOWNPLAY RECONCILIATION CALL)
[1](#)D. CHIANG MAI 3 (RED-SHIRTS FLEX)

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Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (SBU) The low-key dialogue launched in recent months by local red-shirt and yellow-shirt groups, aimed at lowering the political temperature in Chiang Mai, continues to gain legs. Spurred on by positive media coverage and the constructive roles in the process played by academics and business leaders, the Provincial Government is now involved, providing the dialogue some new momentum. Progress is tentative, however, as the participants have backed away from plans to publicly launch a "Coalition for a Peaceful and Livable Chiang Mai" to coincide with the onset of the tourist high season (Ref C).

[1](#)2. (SBU) Comment: The Provincial Government has a vested interest in seeing this process succeed, and its involvement at this time is no coincidence. PM Abhisit Vejjajiva is scheduled to be in Chiang Mai on November 29 for a national gathering of Thai Chambers of Commerce. A rude reception by red-shirts, similar to their harassment of Democrat Party Advisor Chuan Leekpai and other politicians earlier this year (Ref D), is an optic that local officials hope can be avoided through the dialogue process. We are encouraged by the fact that the dialogue is gaining momentum despite opposition by Chiang Mai's most hard-core red-shirt group, and little evident support from national red-shirt and yellow-shirt leaders in Bangkok. End Summary and Comment.

Provincial Government Gets Involved

[1](#)3. (SBU) Representatives of local yellow-shirt and red-shirt camps, along with business leaders and academics, have been working on an initiative to reduce the political temperature in Chiang Mai, seeking to create the conditions that will allow the city to reap the full economic benefits of the high tourist season, which runs from November through February (Refs A-C). The loose grouping, which calls itself the Coalition for a Peaceful and Livable Chiang Mai, last met on November 10 at the request of Chiang Mai's Vice Governor, who presided over the gathering. This meeting marked the first time that the government played a direct mediating role. Others in attendance included key local businessmen, and a university Vice President.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The two-hour long meeting reaffirmed that although the red-shirt and yellow-shirt camps are not prepared to put

their political differences aside, they, along with local community representatives, are willing to work together to convince tourists that Chiang Mai is ready to receive them peacefully and with open arms as in the past. The two sides have reportedly agreed on three critical ground rules for achieving this goal: observe the rule of law; respect the right of freedom of expression and peaceful political activity; and refrain from intimidation or using violence. The parties realize this can be accomplished without compromising political ideology, and that if successful, their efforts could help revive Chiang Mai's economy, which still lags from the global economic downturn.

Obstacles Ahead

15. (SBU) Despite the progress made to date, and the involvement of the Provincial Government, all sides realize that the road ahead will not be entirely smooth. The region's most hardcore red-shirt group, Rak Chiang Mai 51, has already lashed out publicly at the coalition, and its leader said that he would not be seen on the same stage as the yellow-shirt figures involved in the effort. (Comment: Rak Chiang Mai 51 has the most violent tendencies of any of Chiang Mai's red-shirt groups. See Ref D and previous.) Concerned over this type of backlash, participants at the November 10 red-yellow meeting agreed it was premature to publicly announce some sort of joint activity in which both red-shirts and yellow-shirts would participate. Attendees therefore concluded that the Coalition should keep its low profile for now, with an eye toward ultimately attracting greater support from the general public and isolating extremists who would prefer to see the process scuttled.

So What Can the Coalition Do?

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16. (SBU) For now, Coalition participants are pursuing a more modest and less politically loaded goal of organizing joint cultural activities as a confidence-building measure. The Provincial Government expressed its willingness to support this effort by securing a venue, coordinating participants, and financing the activity. Chiang Mai's Vice Governor told us he sees as indispensable the participation of both red-shirt and yellow-shirt leaders (without their colored shirts) for such an event to succeed. However, with arrangements for PM Abhisit's upcoming visit preoccupying the Provincial Government and business leaders, the attendees agreed to put off planning the cultural activity until after November 29.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
MORROW